

National Unity— a Willkie Formula

It includes a "loyal opposition" to
help the Administration by criticism



Wendell Willkie—"This war cannot be won without a united people."



By FRANCIS BROWN

"NATIONAL unity to be real has to be something more than words." Wendell Willkie so declared in one of last week's tense hours. The man who is titular head of the Republican party and in Britain would be leader of the "loyal opposition" has pleaded often for a nation in which recrimination was adjourned and a people stood forth as one before the towering menace of the totalitarian world. His words were now for a country faced no longer with a theory but with reality.

As he spoke the pale sun of early Winter streamed into his dark-paneled office that looks out upon New York's mist-hung harbor, upon Governors Island with its Army barracks and time-stained Castle Williams. In Broad Street, far below, war extras were being cried and serious-faced men stood there, close by Washington's impassive statue before the Subtreasury that marks the site of the first Capitol of the United States.

The tenseness of the hour seemed to penetrate even the well-ordered quiet of Mr. Willkie's skyscraper room. He was in a serious mood. For a while as he talked he leaned forward on his desk, toying with his spectacles. The familiar forelock dropped across his high forehead. "We must recognize the fact," he said, "that debate over our participation in the world conflict has ended. Japan brought it to a close, and Congress, reflecting the will of the people, has declared that a state of war exists. Our one job is to win that war. Have no illusions. It will be a terrible war, for it is not only with Japan. We have been hit by the full force of the totalitarian world. We are in armed conflict not only with Japan but with Germany and Italy as well."

HE paused, pulled a cigarette from one of the two packs on the desk, leaned back in his leather swivel chair. Then, punctuating his words with his hands, a gesture so many thousands of Americans have seen him use, he continued: "This war cannot be won without a united people. All remembrance of past differences over international policy must be forgotten. To symbolize the united effort, some of the leaders among those who have opposed the President's international policy must be called to positions of importance and responsibility. No one questions their patriotism. No one doubts their capacity if given a chance to show it."

Mr. Willkie would go even farther. In filling a post of responsibility he would urge that, if everything else were even, an isolationist be chosen in preference to one who has been an all-out, pre-war supporter of the President's foreign policy. It is time not only to let bygones be bygones, but to show tolerance for differences of opinion now sunk in common determination to win the war.

National unity, of course, is not wholly a matter of agreement on foreign policy. In recent months the strife between indus-

try and organized labor has raised the specter of social disunity, more apparent perhaps than real, yet disturbing enough to bring demands for government regulation of unionism. Mr. Willkie, who made the slogan of "free enterprise" one of his own in his Presidential campaign, opposes today, as he opposed a year ago, the sort of regulation that would curb freedom. Such a curb he sees in the recent House passage of the anti-strike bill.

"I THINK," he remarked, "that there is a good deal to be said for the proposals that labor and industry get together voluntarily and work out some set of principles that will guide their relations during the war." It is C. I. O. President Philip Murray's plan, he admits, adding that such a method had success in the World War. There is no reason to suppose that it would fail now.

The Willkie prescription for national unity, however, does not require that politics be adjourned in the sense that the government function without an opposition group in Congress. Criticism in war as in peace may act like a gyroscope, may keep the ship of state from rolling too far in either direction. It may serve to bring out mistakes of policy and management. As the essence of democratic government, it may help to steady the confidence of a war-worried people in their leadership.

"The opposition," Mr. Willkie quickly adds, "must do nothing that would give aid or comfort to the enemy." Obviously there should not be Congressional opposition of the sort that almost hamstringed Abraham Lincoln's efforts to win the Civil War. Rather should there be opposition of the kind that has kept the British Government in the present conflict relatively alert to the need for change when events have dictated change. In short, the opposition should be "loyal," and such a role for the minority party is the one Mr. Willkie has been urging ever since the electorate thirteen months ago decided to continue the Roosevelt Administration in power.

IF one recalls all the things that were said of Mr. Willkie during 1940, one characterization stands out above all others. It is that he is typically American. He has the American optimism even in the darkest hours. And so, when one talks to him about national morale, the reply can almost be anticipated. He is sure that this country can take it, whatever the word from the fighting fronts. He believes in America and in democracy.

"Democracy shows its greatest strength," is his comment, "in its worst moments. Take England, for example. There was no question of morale there last Winter, when German bombers were pounding London and the ports. It was not only that the British had the stuff. It was the phenomenon common to democracies. When they are hard-pressed, their citizens just stand up on their hind legs and fight. I know (Continued on Page 23)

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that whatever happens to this country, the story will be repeated here."

Wendell Willkie will be 50, come February. Though his thick hair has not turned gray and his big frame—he stands over six feet—is still that of a man of power, he is obviously unlikely to repeat in this war the experience in the last, when the Armistice found him with a commission. What, then, might he do? The direct question he avoids, as he sits there, this lawyer, surrounded by his papers and the legal documents of the profession that brought him to a law firm partnership. He thinks a moment, while the desk lamps glow above the green onyx of the ink stand. From the windows the harbor ferries can be seen, shuttling back and forth; the mist lifts slightly to disclose Brooklyn's dark shore. "Well," Mr. Willkie resumes, "let us consider the part the average private citizen should take in this war."

HE draws on what he saw in Britain. "Men and women there went about their regular jobs," he recalls, "working harder in many instances, but keeping on with the everyday business of life and labor. After all, that in itself is a war contribution. If their abilities were needed in some phase of the government's effort why, naturally, they were called upon to enlist those abilities in public service. So in this country. I see no reason to get excited or emotional. What we need is to keep our heads, and if a man or woman believes he is doing well in his present task, then he should continue with it—against the day he may be called to participate more directly in what we regard as 'war work.'"

Thoughts come to every man as he talks, and so presumably with Mr. Willkie, whose reputation for quick thinking preceded his entrance into politics. As he puts forth his ideas on citizens in wartime, he comes to a pat conclusion. "Why," he asks, "should a man wire the President an offer of services, or rush down to already overcrowded Washington? The President and the government can count on every American, no matter who he is, to do his part. The President knows it. So does every one else in high place. The request has only to be made. Why, then, contribute to possible confusion by volunteering before needed?"

IF Mr. Willkie follows his own dictum, then he will be doing in the months ahead something similar to what he has been doing in the months that are past. He has a law practice to consider, and it may take him into public appearances as did his recent work as counsel for the motion-picture interests during a Senate committee investigation. He is a director of corporations. He is nominally head of the Republican party, and that means periodic meetings with Republicans who hold party posts and elective jobs. Most of all, he is a public figure, a role he fills with all the gusto of the Middle Westerner that he remains.

It is as a public man that he has spoken from one end of the country to the other, that he has appeared before church groups, "Beat Hitler" rallies, United China Relief and Fight for Freedom meetings. He has made radio addresses. He has issued statements to the press on insistent issues before the nation. Through all that he has said and done has run the theme that America could not live by isolationism alone, that so far as the world conflict was concerned the country was a part of what was happening whether it would or no. That was before last week.

NOW the argument moves a step farther. It is a logical step. Mr. Willkie maintains, and with all the vigor that he is capable of, which is considerable, that the United States and its people must see that, once this war is ended, America must regard itself as belonging to the world community. It cannot hide behind high tariff walls. It cannot live alone. In war or peace, isolationism must be a repudiated doctrine. Such is the Willkie course.

Last week, when the nation was moving toward an ordeal surpassing even that of the Revolution when Thomas Paine wrote "these are the times that try men's souls," Wendell Willkie reiterated the position he holds. "We must never forget," he said, "what we are fighting for. We are fighting for the elimination from this world of narrow nationalism and isolationism, which are the breeders of war and of economic degradation and of poverty."